

Rep. Slaughter Calls on President Bush to Explain Emerging White House Briefing Room Scandal

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (NY-28), long time champion of media reform and Ranking Member of the House Committee on Rules, sent a letter to President George W. Bush today asking him to explain how discredited "reporter" Jeff Gannon was credentialed as a member of the legitimate media by the White House.

The letter follows:

Wednesday, February 9, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush

President of the United States

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In light of the mounting evidence that your Administration has, on several occasions, paid members of the media to advocate in favor of Administration policies, I feel compelled to ask you to address a matter brought to my attention by the *Niagara Falls Reporter* (article attached) , a local newspaper in my district, regarding James "JD" Guckert (AKA Jeff Gannon) of *Talon News* .

According to several credible reports, "Mr. Gannon" has been repeatedly credentialed as a member of the White House press corps by your office and has been regularly called upon in White House press briefings by your Press Secretary Scott McClellan, despite the fact evidence shows that "Mr. Gannon" is a Republican political operative, uses a false name, has phony or questionable journalistic credentials, is known for plagiarizing much of the "news" he reports, and according to several web reports, may have ties to the promotion of the prostitution of military personnel.

Several weeks ago when it was revealed that radio/TV host Armstrong Williams had received payment from your Administration in exchange for his vocal support of the 'No Child Left Behind' initiative, I was stunned. For years now I have been leading the fight in Congress for fairness and accountability in the media; the Williams revelation only underscored the need for a media that has integrity, is balanced and expresses the local interests and concerns of its consumers.

Since that time, two more members of the media have been found to have received money from your Administration in exchange for their vocal, yet undisclosed support of Administration policies.

And just this morning we have learned that "Mr. Gannon" has resigned his post at the, so called, *Talon News* amid growing concerns over his controversial background and

falsified qualifications. In fact, it appears that "Mr. Gannon's" presence in the White House press corps was merely as a tool of propaganda for your Administration.

Mr. President, I am sure we both agree the White House Press Corps is an honored institution in America that should be beyond the scope of partisan meddling, and that a free and independent media is the cornerstone of our success as a democracy. Likewise, I am sure we can both agree the American people have the right to expect that journalists who question their President everyday are experienced, independent, and perhaps most importantly, unbiased in their approach.

I was already concerned about what appears to be an organized campaign to mask partisan propaganda as legitimate news by your Administration. That we have now learned this same type of deception is occurring inside the White House briefing room itself is even more disturbing.

That is why I am asking you to please explain to the Congress and to the American people how and why the individual known as "Mr. Gannon" was repeatedly cleared by your staff to join the legitimate White House press corps?

Mr. President, your Administration has driven the so-called "values" debate in this country. But the most important value for those of us in public service should always be honesty and integrity, particularly when considering the manner in which we conduct our affairs of state.

I would appreciate your prompt response on this matter.

Respectfully,

/LMS

Louise M. Slaughter

Ranking Member, House Committee on Rules

From the Niagara Falls Reporter on Monday, February 7, 2005

AN OPEN LETTER TO LOUISE SLAUGHTER

Dear Rep. Slaughter,

As a small newspaper located in your district, we are asking for your help. It has come to our attention that an individual who calls himself "Jeff Gannon" has been credentialed by the White House to attend press briefings and presidential news conferences.

He is affiliated with an organization called Talon News, and is frequently called on by White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan and President Bush. This individual has no background in journalism whatsoever, and his "syndicated column" appears solely on his personal Web site, www.jeffgannon.com. According to the *Philadelphia Daily News*, "Jeff Gannon" isn't even his real name.

In his biography at the Talon News site, where he holds the title of "Washington Bureau Chief," he claims to be a graduate of the "Pennsylvania State University System" and the Leadership Institute Broadcast School of Journalism.

While the 23 schools in the Penn State system award diplomas, the system itself does not, and the *Daily News* investigation has thus far failed to turn up a "Jeff Gannon" who holds a degree in education from Penn State, as this person claims he does. Furthermore, the Leadership Institute Broadcast School of Journalism is a right-wing diploma mill where anyone with \$50 and two days to waste can receive a degree.

As for Talon News itself, it seems to consist solely of a Web site that links directly to a Republican site called www.gopusa.com. Both Talon and GOPUSA have the same mailing address, a private residence in Texas. It isn't clear whether anyone at Talon News is paid, as one portion of its site asks, "Want to join the Talon News team? Click here to find out more about being a volunteer reporter for Talon News."

Looking at the staff biography section of the site, none of the 10 individuals listed appear to have any training or previous experience in journalism, although all list credentials as Republican activists.

We respectfully ask your office to look into how a partisan political organization and an individual with no credentials as a reporter -- and apparently operating under an assumed name -- landed a coveted spot in the White House press corps.

Sincerely,

Bruce Battaglia, publisher, Mike Hudson, editor in chief, Rebecca Day, senior editor, David Staba, sports editor, Bill Gallagher, national correspondent, John Hanchette, senior correspondent, Frank Thomas Croisdale, contributing editor, Bill Bradberry, contributing editor, Niagara Falls Reporter.